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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000699

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2016

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SUBJECT: FAL CLARIFIES HIS POSITION ON SLAVERY; EMBASSY
POSITION ON SLAVERY ISSUE UNCHANGED

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 664

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(U) Key Points

-- During a speech in the southern city of Rosso June 3, Col Fal clarified his position on slavery, a topic he first publicly addressed during his May 27 speech in Akjoujt (reftel).

-- Fal said "slavery has never been legal, it existed during a period of anarchy (before French colonialization), but never under the flag of the Mauritanian state."

-- Fal said those who make slavery an issue are doing so for ulterior motives, and he called on these groups to stop their actions which are leading to the "condemnation" of Mauritania as a "slavery country."

(C) Comments

-- As the Embassy reported in reftel, media outlets and others misread Fal's elliptical comments, believing that he had acknowledged the existence of slavery. He had not. This latest speech clarified his earlier, misunderstood comments.

-- For the record, the Embassy's position on the slavery issue has not changed: Chattel slavery almost certainly does not exist in Mauritania, but conditions of extreme servitude stopping just short of slavery do exist. Also, we continue to believe that elements of ownership by one human over another may well be found in some of these relationships, especially in remote regions of the country where a barter economy still prevails.

-- Parts of these regions lie beyond the effective control of the central government, and the laws against slavery are not enforced. In fact, the people living there probably are not even aware of these laws. They don't even know Taya is no longer in power, according to recent reports from the interior.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) Fal spoke to a crowd of several thousand in the southern city of Rosso June 3 as part of a national presidential tour that began April 28. While the speech was originally planned to get-out-the-vote for the National Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 25, Fal used more than half the speech to clarify his position on slavery, a topic he first addressed during his May 27 speech in Akjoujt (reftel).

Fal clarifies his position

¶2. (U) "Slavery has never been legal, it existed during a period of anarchy, but never under the flag of the Mauritanian state," Fal said, adding that "we have only a stratified society that exists throughout the region...and is not specific to us." Fal explained that Mauritania suffers from the "vestiges" of this stratified society of wealth and poverty, as do many other nations, but he restated that this was different from the issue of slavery.

¶3. (U) Fal said Mauritania had a long history of legally prohibiting slavery, beginning with French colonization in 1905, followed by independence in 1960 which "renewed the same law," followed by an anti-slavery ordinance passed in 1981 and finally the 1991 constitution which Fal said "declared equality, not slavery." Fal said "therefore on the legal front we have abolished slavery for forty years, and we have never stopped the legal abolition of slavery."

¶4. (U) Fal said that those who are making slavery an issue

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are doing so for ulterior motives, "because slavery is not a legal problem." Fal called on these groups to stop their actions which are leading to the "condemnation" of Mauritania as a "slavery country."

¶5. (C) Observers reported that Fal appeared quite heated during his speech, and repeated many of his points four and five times.
LeBaron